

JAPANESE WATER

There is a quality to Japanese water
that makes everyone submerged in it
laugh like they never laughed before.

The clarity of the oriental fluid
and its soft, oxygenated texture
combine with its boundless plenitude
to lift the immersed into moods ranging
from giddiness to hysteria.

The popular piscines of Paris,
the Olympic sized affairs divided into lanes,
long reflecting pools where the images
of monuments wiggle patriotically --
all are dwarfed by Japanese water.

Even after being struck on the head
by airborne wooden buckets hurled
by the more rambunctious bathers,
people in Japanese water can only laugh,
and laugh the more for being conked.

Measured against any other body of water,
nothing seeks its own level with such
sheer excitement as the Japanese kind.

Banish all thoughts of the Nile,
Lakes Victoria, Mead and Superior,
and the shocking chill of fjord water.
These are lost thimbles next to
the infinite generosity of the above
mentioned liquid.

Here you can wade over and join Hayashi
and her girlfriends flicking the stuff
with their fingernails or testing the surface
with their delicate palms.

Look at the men splashing over there,
churning up the frothy Japanese water
while mothers from unpronounceable
villages drop their buoyant babies in.

Watch heads disappear under Japanese water
then emerge slowly, black hair plastered down,
or break the green surface
yelling spontaneous haiku.

The laughter rises like air in balloons
and floats into the miniature distance
where thousands of bright kimonos hang on pegs,
colorful strokes from a tiny brush
dipped in you know what.

PORLOCK BEACH

The horizon is clear enough to show
its curvature, continuous and perfect,
like a line from Picasso's hand

uninterrupted by a backfiring car
or a phone call from Man Ray.

LIGHTYEAR

Light did not do much travelling this year,
mostly just shone around the house,
too dim even to read a magazine by,
developing a squint.
Odd behaviour for a force that is usually
zooming through the cosmos
at a speed with as many zeros as a shut-out.
But everybody has a slump now and then,
even principles of the material universe.

Physicists were less tolerant of this
mopiness and gathered on her from lawn
first trying to cheer Light up with flattery.
"You're our beacon, our candle in the window,"
then letting loose with the ridicule.
"Something wrong with your photons?"
"And you call yourself a constant!"

Their articles in scientific journals
mocked the theory that lovesickness was to blame,
though neighbors returning home at night
from a movie or a party would notice her
sitting out on the veranda, rocking slowly,
and holding in her luminous hands
a photograph of Einstein as a young man.